



## Author Spotlight Alice Walker

Alice Walker, perhaps best known as the author of *The Color Purple*, was born on February 9, 1944 in Eatonton, Georgia, the eighth and last child of sharecroppers. After a childhood accident blinded her in one eye, she went on to become valedictorian of her local school, and attend Spelman College and Sarah Lawrence College on scholarships, graduating in 1965.

She volunteered in the voter registration drives of the 1960s in Georgia, and went to work after college in the Welfare Department in New York City.

She married in 1967 (and divorced in 1976); her first book of poems came out in 1968 and her first novel just after her daughter's birth in 1970.

Her early poems, novels and short stories dealt with themes familiar to readers of her later works: rape, violence, isolation, troubled relationships, multi-generational perspectives, sexism and racism.

When *The Color Purple* was published in 1982, Walker became known to an even wider audience. Her Pulitzer Prize and the movie by Steven Spielberg brought both fame and controversy. She was widely criticized for negative portrayals of men in *The Color Purple*, though many critics admitted that the movie presented more simplistic negative pictures than the book's more nuanced portrayals.

Walker also published a biography of the poet, Langston Hughes, and worked to recover and publicize the nearly-lost works of writer Zora Neale Hurston. She's credited with introducing the word "womanist" for African American feminism.

In 1989 and 1992, in two books, *The Temple of My Familiar* and *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Walker took on the issue of female circumcision in Africa, which brought further controversy: was Walker a cultural imperialist to criticize a different culture?

Her works are known for their portrayals of the African American woman's life. She depicts vividly the sexism, racism and poverty that make that life often a struggle. But she also portrays as part of that life, the strengths of family, community, self-worth, and spirituality.

Many of her novels depict women in other periods of history than our own. Just as with non-fiction women's history writing, such portrayals give a sense of the differences and similarities of women's condition today and in that other time.

She continues not only to write, but to be active in environmental, feminist/womanist causes, and issues of economic justice.



**Books by Alice Walker – those with an asterisk (\*) are owned by the Lynchburg Public Library**

**Fiction**

- \*Now is the Time to Open Your Heart* (2004)
- \*The Way Forward is with a Broken Heart* (2001)
- \*By The Light of My Father's Smile* (1998)
- The Complete Stories.* (2000, 1994)
- \*Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992)
- \*The Temple of My Familiar* (1989)
- \*The Color Purple* (1982)
- You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down* (1981)
- Meridian* (1976)
- \*In Love and Trouble : Stories of Black Women* (1973)
- \*The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970)
- Finding the Greenstone.* (1991) Juvenile audience

**Non-Fiction**

- Langston Hughes, American Poet* (1974, 2002)
- \*The Same River Twice : Honoring the Difficult* (1996)
- \*Warrior Marks : Female Genital Mutilation and the Sexual Blindings of Women.* With Pratibha Parmar. (1993)

**Poetry**

- \*Absolute Trust in the Goodness of the Earth : New Poems.* (2004)
- \*Sent by Earth: A Message from the Grandmother Spirit after the Attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon* (2001)
- \*Her BlueBody Everything We Know : Earthling Poems, 1965-1990 complete* (1991)
- Horses Make a Landscape Look More Beautiful* (1985)
- \*Good Night Willie Lee, I'll See you in the Morning* (1979)
- Revolutionary Petunias* (1973)
- Once* (1968)

**Essays**

- \*Anything we Love Can be Saved : a Writer's Activism* (1997)
- \*Living by the Word: Selected Writings 1973-1987* (1988)
- \*In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* (1983)

**If you like Alice Walker's books, try some of these authors:**

**Authors similar to Alice Walker**

Edwidge Danticat  
Zora Neale Hurston

Toni Morrison  
Zadie Smith

**The following are authors that deal with issues facing black women. They have a more mainstream appeal than some of the previous authors.**

Bebe Moore Campbell  
Pearl Cleage  
Bernice McFadden

Jamaica Kincaid  
Terry McMillan  
Gloria Naylor

**Although the following authors do not write about African-American life, they do write about complex women and the issues they face that are closely related to their culture/background.**

Isabel Allende  
Julia Alvarez  
Sandra Cisneros  
Louise Erdrich

Barbara Kingsolver  
Jhumpa Lahiri  
Amy Tan